UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.3/1997/18
9 January 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

STATISTICAL COMMISSION
Twenty-ninth session
10-14 February 1997
Item 12 of the provisional agenda*

TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN STATISTICS

Technical cooperation activities in statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

The present report has been prepared in response to the request by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-eighth session (New York, 27 February-3 March 1995) that the United Nations Statistics Division submit a consolidated report on the state of technical cooperation in the field of statistics to the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination.

The information obtained from both donors and recipients has been aggregated and is provided in annex I and annex II respectively of this report.

At the request of the Working Group at its eighteenth session, held in New York, from 16 to 18 April 1996 (see document E/CN.3/1997/19, para. 36), two reports on crucial issues on technical cooperation were prepared, one by the Secretary-General (E/CN.3/1997/18/Add.1) and one by Statistics Canada (E/CN.3/1997/18/Add.2).

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Statistical Commission, at its twenty-eighth session (New York, 27 February-3 March 1995), requested the United Nations Statistics Division to submit an analytical written report to the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination on the subject of technical cooperation in statistics.[1] The United Nations Statistics Division reported the problems encountered in the preparation of the report on technical cooperation funding to the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its eighteenth session (New York, 16-18 April 1996) as well as to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Statistical Activities at its thirtieth session (New York, 7-9 May 1996) (see documents E/CN.3/AC.1/1996/R.6 and E/CN.3/1997/21, para. 11, respectively). The Working Group took note of these problems and requested that a report be prepared for the Statistical Commission using the available information. The Working Group also requested that Statistics Canada, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) work with the United Nations Statistics Division to include in the report of the United Nations Statistics Division coverage of crucial issues related to technical cooperation (E/CN.3/1997/19, para. 36 (b)). The report on those crucial issues is provided to the Statistical Commission as documents E/CN.3/1997/18/Add.1 and E/CN.3/1997/18/Add.2.

I. ACTIONS TAKEN

2. Based on experience gained from previous questionnaires and a pilot study undertaken in August 1995, the United Nations Statistics Division believed that it was not feasible to classify technical cooperation funding information precisely in a uniform manner, given the varying methods and definitions adopted in the process of accounting for technical cooperation by different donors and recipients as well as the different accounting periods.

3. Accordingly, the United Nations Statistics Division decided not to provide a precise definition for the term "technical cooperation funding in statistics" or to disaggregate such a category. It recognized that each statistical office might interpret this category differently. However, the common culture of national statistics offices was such that the differences should be reasonably small and the aggregate information might still be useful.

4. The information sought for the report included direction or source of technical cooperation (depending on whether the country was a donor or recipient), the project title and a brief description, as well as the annual cost of the assistance involved.

5. The questionnaire requesting the information on technical cooperation was sent to 25 donor countries, 25 international donor organizations and 158 recipient countries as well as four countries that were grouped as both donors and recipients.

6. Thirty-three donor countries and organizations responded. In addition, 41 developing countries and countries with economies in transition also responded. However, only eight donor countries, four donor organizations and the European Communities, and 27 recipient countries were able to supply values of technical assistance provided and received. (Some donor countries and organizations provided substantial descriptive material of their technical assistance activities without value indicators.) Therefore, value figures of technical assistance provided are by no means to be considered complete and accurate.

7. That most recipient countries that responded provided only sporadic value figures for certain statistical projects for some years made it difficult to analyse the situation. An attempt was also made to aggregate value figures by country/organization in one common currency (in this case, United States dollars. The harmonization was made using mid-point exchange rates for respective years. Therefore, currency fluctuation might also affect the results of the aggregation. The quantitative responses to the questionnaire are shown in annex I to this report for donor countries/organizations and in annex II for recipient countries. Countries/organizations that provided value figures even for one year are included in the annexes. A full list of the countries/organizations that responded to the inquiry is provided in annex III.

8. For the donor countries listed in annex I, technical assistance provided increased from 11 million dollars to 15 million dollars over the period 1992-1994. However, there was a decrease to under 9 million dollars in 1995. It should be noted that many donor countries are not represented in annex I, and also that there is little correlation between the totals provided by donor countries and those provided by recipient countries, lending further doubt as to the utility of these data. With regard to the donor organizations that reported, amounts in 1992 and 1993 were stable; there was a 30 per cent decline in 1994 and a further 30 per cent decline between 1994 and 1995. The assistance provided by the European Union fluctuated considerably from year to year with a low of 7 million dollars in 1994 and a high of 34 million dollars in 1995.

II. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

9. The Commission may wish to:

(a) Discuss what, if any, generalizable conclusion may be drawn from the data provided;

(b) Comment on points made in documents E/CN.3/1997/18/Add.1 and E/CN.3/1997/18/Add.2;

(c) Consider ways to obtain more complete and accurate information on funding for technical cooperation.

Notes

[1] See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1995, Supplement No. 8 (E/1995/28), para. 87 (c).

Annex I

TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN STATISTICS
(DONOR INFORMATION)

Number	Country/organization	Amount (in US dollars)			
		1992	1993	1994	1995
1	Australia	129 614	130 535	199 300	93 890
2	Austria	Not available	2 635	5 129	2 440
3	Canada	558 247	453 240	845 316	621 633
4	Finland	3 813	9 509	12 650	72 264
5	Japan	4 375 866	4 606 169	5 308 564	71 476
6	Portugal	6 133	28 645	17 629	38 317
7	United Kingdom	445 168	2 406 819	3 052 097	2 531 788
8	United States	5 627 219	5 143 219	5 974 069	5 566 851
	Total (countries)	11 146 060	12 780 771	15 414 754	8 998 659
9	FAO[a]	11 906 439	12 585 141	8 092 356	5 747 768
10	ISI[b]	30 000	12 000	36 000	30 000
11	UNESCO[c]	1 112 500	713 300	896 700	583 166
12	UNIDO[d]	595 400	174 500	671 965	232 000
	Total (organizations)	13 644 339	13 484 941	9 697 021	6 592 934
13	European Communities	17 471 080	21 305 174	6 614 020	33 537 120

[a] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

[b] International Statistical Institute.

[c] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

[d] United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

Annex II

TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN STATISTICS
(RECIPIENT INFORMATION)

Number	Country	Amount (in US dollars)			
		1992	1993	1994	1995
1	Barbados	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	75 000
2	Belarus	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	306 000
3	Belize	21 579	110 197	103 892	n.a.
4	Bolivia	1 084 893	764 111	314 784	521 862
5	Cyprus	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	143 900
6	Czech Republic	52 747	65 183	27 260	42 589
7	Ecuador	n.a.	23 614	n.a.	15 000
8	Indonesia	40 000	n.a.	1 027 144	443 260
9	Jordan	n.a.	n.a.	104 368	175 451
10	Kyrgyzstan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2 806 636
11	Latvia	n.a.	n.a.	866 000	738 433
12	Malaysia	n.a.	341 091	94 025	n.a.
13	Marshall Islands	n.a.	65 000	10 000	20 000
14	Morocco	n.a.	113 540	136 780	188 278
15	Panama	n.a.	594 000	n.a.	195 500
16	Peru	479 964	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
17	Philippines	1 394 832	474 737	205 377	338 005
18	Romania	4 542 000	10 602	5 483 540	331 960
19	Slovakia	1 298 000	n.a.	374 850	2 092 800
20	Slovenia	12 392	11 655	96 837	55 827
21	Sri Lanka	300 000	n.a.	n.a.	35 000
22	Swaziland	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	385 619

Number	Country	Amount (in US dollars)			
		1992	1993	1994	1995
23	Syrian Arab Republic	n.a.	256 191	196 425	510 871
24	Thailand	425 925	n.a.	n.a.	45 000
25	Uganda	1 072 479	2 301 865	1 631 966	3 703 413
26	Ukraine	220 551	429 080	364 130	89 430
27	Venezuela	n.a.	n.a..	194 750	n.a.
	Total	10 945 362	5 560 866	11 232 158	13 259 834

Note: "n.a." means data unavailable.

Annex III

LIST OF REPLIES RECEIVED FROM COUNTRIES/ORGANIZATIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE ON TECHNICAL COOPERATION

Donor countries

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics
2. Federal Statistical Office, Germany
3. Statistics Bureau, Japan
4. Statistics Canada
5. Austrian Central Statistical Office
6. Statistics Denmark
7. Statistics Finland
8. National Statistical Service of Greece
9. Statistics Iceland
10. National Statistical Office, Republic of Korea
11. Statistics Netherlands
12. Statistics New Zealand
13. National Statistical Institute, Portugal
14. Office of Management and Budget, United States of America

Donor organizations

1. United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
2. International Labour Organization (ILO)
3. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
4. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
5. International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
6. International Monetary Fund (IMF)

7. Universal Postal Union (UPU)

8. International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

9. World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)

10. World Trade Organization

11. Information Systems Coordination Committee (ISCC)

12. World Customs Organization (WCO)

13. Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat)

14. Inter-American Statistical Institute (IASI)

15. International Statistical Institute (ISI)

16. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

17. Overseas Development Administration (ODA)

18. United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)

19. World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD))

Recipient countries

1. Armenia
2. Barbados
3. Belarus
4. Belize
5. Bermuda
6. Bolivia
7. Bulgaria
8. Cyprus
9. Czech Republic
10. Ecuador
11. Egypt
12. Estonia
13. Haiti
14. Hungary
15. Indonesia
16. Jamaica
17. Jordan
18. Kazakstan
19. Kyrgyzstan
20. Latvia
21. Malawi
22. Malaysia
23. Maldives
24. Marshall Islands
25. Mexico
26. Morocco
27. Panama
28. Peru
29. Philippines
30. Romania
31. Slovakia
32. Swaziland
33. Thailand
34. Turkey
35. Uganda
36. Venezuela
37. Yugoslavia
38. Nicaragua
39. Sri Lanka
40. Syrian Arab Republic
41. Ukraine

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TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN STATISTICS

Crucial issues on technical cooperation

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

1. The Statistical Commission has placed in its agenda at all of its recent sessions (at least five) the issue of technical cooperation. One of the requested items has been an analysis of the funding provided for technical cooperation by national as well as international sources. Document E/CN.3/1997/18 is a report on this subject. However, in addition to funding concerns there are other, equally important areas, which are central in determining whether technical cooperation efforts are successful.

2. One area that is often overlooked in predicting the success of technical cooperation efforts is the commitment of the Government to the mission. Often it is not sufficient to have just the commitment of the national statistics office (NSO): its parent and associated ministries must be committed as well. The outputs of the project should be visible not only to the NSO but also to other government ministries as well as to the general public. An example may clarify this point. Suppose there exists a project for improving the capacity of a country to plan, execute and disseminate social data collections. The NSO may be quite excited about the project and may put considerable energy and resources at its end into the project. However, if the Government has determined that financial statistics are more important and if social statistics do not figure prominently in the national debate in the country, the results of the project - even if technically successful - may not make any difference in regard to decision-making by government officials or by ordinary citizens. In

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this case, the project may even be counter-productive. The donor country may not see tangible public use of its aid and those inside the Government may think that aid for statistics projects is not useful.

3. Both the donor country/agency and the recipient country, in deciding on a potential technical cooperation project, should consider not only the technical feasibility but also the usefulness of the project in the political and public decision-making arena. While statisticians should not, when acting in their capacity as professionals, engage on one or the other political side, they should nonetheless ensure that their products are important to the political debate. This factor should also be important in regard to choosing technical cooperation projects.

4. An associated issue that is often difficult for government officials and the general public to understand is that concerning the time lag between the onset of technical cooperation and the production of useful outputs. While it is important not to raise unreasonable expectations about when results will be available, it is just as vital to indicate clearly the time pressures under which government officials operate. Statisticians understand that it may take years to properly design, execute and analyse a sample survey from scratch; however, it is very difficult to explain this to politicians and others whose time-horizon is one of months rather than years. The donor country can be particularly useful in this area by helping to devise interim measures while supporting the NSO in its need to build a strong base for proper data-collection, analysis and dissemination activities.

5. One of the fundamental methods for building capacity is through training. Two basic types of training are noted here. The first type focuses on producing an understanding of the broad and basic fundamentals of statistics, and is normally accomplished through the attending of a university, usually at the graduate level. There are many excellent graduate-level programmes in statistics throughout the world and some countries have begun to establish programmes devoted to graduate training in official statistics. However, the vast majority of these programmes are in developed countries. The most pressing need, then, is to dramatically improve the quality and quantity of undergraduate- and graduate-level university programmes in developing countries. This is certainly a long-range programme; however, if it is not undertaken only marginal gains can be expected, in both qualitative and quantitative terms, from the statistics infrastructure in developing countries. Resources can be concentrated in developing a few regional graduate or specialized schools.

6. The other type of training is more focused on some particular need such as the construction of business registers, sampling techniques and seasonal adjustment methods. Often, the most cost-efficient way to accomplish this type of training is through having the instructor go to the country involved. Many donor countries think the most effective way to deliver this type of support is through two or more reasonably short missions in the country. Fellowships or study tours can be an effective way for statisticians from one country to learn from those of their neighbours having similar problems or from more advanced offices. It is of course important to ensure that those participants on the study tour are the ones who can benefit directly from the technical material.

7. A problem that is frequently brought up with respect to training concerns the fact that after the training too often the recipients of the training leave with their new knowledge for higher-paying jobs in the private sector or in quasi-governmental organizations. Given the dynamics of many developing countries, including the great disparity in pay levels, it is probably unrealistic to expect this situation to change in the foreseeable future. Although it is possible to try to target training towards those more apt to stay and to require post-training contracts, both donor and recipient countries should expect that only a fraction - often only a small fraction - of those trained will be likely to remain in government service.

8. It is understandable that recipient countries would like to avail themselves of expertise from as wide a pool as possible. However, donor resources are scarce and their allocation should be carried out as efficiently as possible. It is clear that the recipient country is in the best position to coordinate its own requirements. In fact, no other entity can so identify country needs. However, donors should be aware of what help is being or has been proposed so that they can make informed decisions. We think an information system - not a coordinating mechanism - would be useful here. This system may be nothing more than a bulletin board organized by the recipient country and available to all. Each donor country would list its project, giving no more than a name and brief description. Other donors who might be interested in engaging in a project with that country could consult the listing and, if they wished, retrieve more information or decide to coordinate their work. The United Nations Statistics Division could provide this facility. We stress that the bulletin board is meant to facilitate coordination among donors should they wish to coordinate their activities.

9. It is important that technical cooperation projects encompass just that - cooperation - and not merely assistance. Mere technical assistance will usually not provide for any capacity-building. For effectiveness in building capacity, there must be a substantial technology transfer between donor and recipient. Moreover, there is more intellectual and emotional satisfaction when a partnership exists between the players. Such an atmosphere will contribute to the possibility of a lasting technology transfer.

10. Finally, the objectives of the project must be clear, measurable and of a substantially statistical nature. Technical cooperation projects in statistics should not be used as a disguise for obtaining vehicles and other equipment (admittedly, perhaps much-needed) only tangentially related to statistics.

UNITED
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Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.3/1997/18/Add.2
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ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

STATISTICAL COMMISSION
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10-14 February 1997
Item 12 of the provisional agenda*

TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN STATISTICS

Crucial issues on technical cooperation

A framework for the description and analysis of technical assistance

Note by Statistics Canada

Addendum

There are three components of the framework:

1. Supply of foreign assistance: what are the elements of supply and the conditions surrounding it needed in order to ensure success?

Examples of elements: qualities of the adviser (congeniality, adaptability, inventiveness, sensitivity, experience, physical stamina); qualities of the support system (range and availability of documentation, access to network of qualified advisers, credibility of supporting system); capacity for sustainment; capacity to bring up reinforcements and so on. Surrounding conditions: relevance of subject; sympathy for the host country; ease of financing; assurance of comfortable conditions for adviser; local support system; efficient backstopping from headquarters.

2. Demand for foreign assistance: what are the elements of demand and the conditions surrounding it needed in order to ensure success?

Examples: clarity of purpose, definition of terms of reference, timely allocation of responsibilities to host country staff. Conditions: receptivity,

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ability to change work patterns, support from other agencies in host country, ability to intervene effectively in cases of tension or disagreement and so on.

3. Criteria for defining success: success can be viewed from the demand and from the supply side. There is no necessary coincidence of the criteria used for each side nor is agreement between them assured.

4. Elements of success include, in the short term: completion of specific projects and publication (in the case of statistical information) or deployment (in the case of trained staff, new software/hardware) of results.

5. In the medium term: increased independence from foreign advice; augmented capacity to take local initiatives; extension of host office's activities; enhanced visibility of home office.

6. In the long term: sustainable capability to accommodate new demands and circumstances; perception of the host institution as both credible and capable; consolidation of statistical roles and responsibilities; greater capacity to manage budgetary upheavals and so on.

7. Analysis: there are two main subjects for analysis and both result from tensions among these elements.

First: requests for assistance are seldom made when circumstances surrounding supply and demand are at their best. Typically: host institution may not benefit from widespread local support; staff may be divided as to advisability of foreign assistance; there may be solid resistance to necessary change; circumstances (financial and material) may be poor and so on. Likewise: for the supplying institution, adviser may not be available on time; best adviser may not be available; there may be language and cultural barriers; there may be incompatibility with regard to the advice given by two different sources of assistance and so on.

Second: there may be different perceptions as to what constitutes success; and third: there may be significant differences as to what constitutes necessary success in the short, medium and longer terms.

For example: from the point of view of the host, all that may matter is the building up of a sustainable capability; from the point of view of the adviser, all that may matter is the completion of the specific task (or vice versa). This conflict may not be obvious to either party, in which case it is not until late that its consequences will become apparent. The adviser may strive for statistical reliability of results; the host for speed of release so as to enhance the visibility of the institution. The adviser may value international comparability; the host, national idiosyncrasies and so on.

8. Mechanisms for conflict resolution: there must be the specification of a number of mechanisms.

First: mechanisms to resolve conflict over desirable versus actual conditions for supply. Typically, there are, at the extremes, two options - Go and No go. In practice, a mechanism is required to detect the nature of circumstances and

to act so as to improve them (for adviser, more support, better local conditions, and so on) in order to increase the chances of success.

Second: mechanisms to resolve conflict over desirable conditions surrounding demand versus conditions prevailing. The host must recognize the obstacles to success and be given pre-assistance support (better material conditions, neutralization of home opposition to assistance, and so on) so as to neutralize them.

Third: mechanisms must exist to narrow perceptions of success, should a gap evolve between the perceptions of the adviser and the perceptions of the host. A requirement is that there be detection of the gap and the capacity to bring about prompt intervention.

Examples of mechanisms: thorough evaluation of assistance projects, particularly those that did not work out (evaluation must attempt to identify circumstances that appear to have brought about failure. Proper confidentiality provisions must surround the process in order not to embarrass the host and the source of assistance); constitution of a "library of failures and successes" and proper briefing of advisers on relevant elements of the library.

9. Resurrection of tripartite reviews (of substance and not of finance or pure management) using credible consultants to conduct them. Association with an experienced assistance provider who will process an audit of the project.